



UPDATE

Virginia Keeps America Moving

Fall 1997

Dear I-81 Neighbors,

Last winter, we announced that VDOT had begun studying how best to widen and improve the 325 miles of I-81 in Virginia. Today, all studies are under way. VDOT consultants are looking at 10 contiguous interstate segments - conducting environmental studies, analyzing traffic patterns, and developing road-widening options that will carry us beyond the year 2020. The studies, which will take about 18 months, are scheduled to be finished by the end of 1998. After that, we'll begin setting construction priorities.

Meanwhile, VDOT engineers are meeting with local officials along the I-81 corridor to discuss each region's long-range economic development plans, so that we can factor them into the decision-making process. If your locality hasn't been contacted yet, please feel free to call Fred Kiiffner at (804)786-6275 in the Location and Design Division at VDOT's Central Office in Richmond. We also will hold two public meetings in each study area. So far, one public meeting has been held - in Bristol - so there will be more opportunities to comment in the near future.

One of the most important aspects of the I-81 study process is coordination. VDOT project managers are closely monitoring and reviewing the work of the I-81 consultants to ensure continuity among the studies. By viewing the interstate as a continuous corridor in the early study stages, we can ensure consistent construction results in the future - and a consistently smooth and safe ride for our travelers.

Finally, we are pleased with the public feedback we have received about the I-81 improvement studies. The Harrisonburg *Daily News-Record* published an extensive and informative section for its readers on "I-81: Driving Force of the Valley." At a recent conference of legislators from Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania, Virginia was seen as a front-runner in planning for I-81's future. And local governments, universities and citizens have expressed strong interest in the project.

Thank you for your ideas so far, and we look forward to working with you in this long-term partnership to improve I-81.

David R. Gehr, Commissioner
Virginia Department of Transportation

Smart Travel Plans Move Ahead

Smart Travel - Virginia's brand name for travel technology advancements - is heading for I-81. Several new technologies will be up and running soon:

1. CVISN technology (pronounced "C-vision" for Commercial Vehicle Information Systems and Networks) will begin limited operations this fall at the Stephens City weigh station off I-81 near Winchester. Five companies have volunteered to test the new "smart clearance" equipment that allows trucks that consistently comply with state laws to gain faster computer clearance at weigh stations.

Trucks participating in the testing phase will have a two-inch-square transponder box mounted on the truck's windshield. As the truck approaches the weigh station, a "reader" device mounted overhead accesses a computer database and checks the truck's safety rating and required credentials. If the truck is in compliance, then the driver sees a green light flash on the transponder and continues down the interstate; if there are compliance problems, the driver is given a red light and pulls into the weigh station for a closer inspection.

"CVISN technology rewards those in compliance and allows us to focus on those who are not," says Ken Jennings, VDOT's truck weigh program manager. "It's technology designed to serve our customers." VDOT, in collaboration with the Virginia State Police and the Department of Motor Vehicles, will continue to recruit commercial carriers to test the equipment.



I-81 Improvements Slated for 1997-98

Road construction is scheduled to begin in spring 1998:

- In the Bristol area, VDOT will widen seven miles of I-81 from the Virginia-Tennessee border to Exit 7. This section will be widened from four to six lanes.
- East of Christiansburg, VDOT will construct a new Christiansburg area interchange and collector-distributor roads that will move traffic on and off I-81 more smoothly.

Rest area improvements are planned for four I-81 facilities in 1997-98:

- Wythe County northbound - expand car parking and restroom facilities.
- Washington County truck-only northbound - water, sewer and building improvements.
- Frederick County (Clearbrook area) - expand restrooms, sewer improvements.
- Botetourt rest area southbound - sewer improvements.

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Status Report: I-81 Studies

VDOT initiated the I-81 studies to determine the best roadway-widening and improvement options needed to ease traffic flow along the Virginia section of I-81. Seven consulting firms are conducting 10 separate studies, as listed below. Each study includes land surveys, environmental and historical studies, and traffic analyses.

Two citizen information meetings will be held in each study area to discuss improvement options. Meeting time frames listed below are estimates. To find out more specific meeting information:

- Watch for public meeting notices in your local newspaper.
- Check VDOT's Website at www.vdot.state.va.us.
- Contact the VDOT District Office nearest you:

Bristol	(540) 669-6151
Salem	(540) 387-5320
Staunton	(540) 332-9075

Study Area 1

Washington County from Exit 7 north to Exit 22 south of Meadowview.

Status: First citizen information meeting held in February 1997, to review road-widening and design options. Second public meeting will take place in November 1997. Study scheduled for completion in early 1998.

Study Area 2

Washington, Smyth and Wythe counties from 1 mile (1.6km) north of Route 704 at Exit 22 between Abingdon and Meadowview to I-77 near Wytheville.

Status: Traffic study under way. First citizen information meeting will take place in early 1998. Study scheduled for completion in late 1998.

Study Area 3

Wythe County from I-81/77 overlap near Wytheville to I-77 near Ft. Chiswell.

Status: Traffic study under way. First citizen information meeting will take place in early 1998. Study scheduled for completion in late 1998.

Study Area 4

Wythe, Pulaski and Montgomery counties from I-77 near Ft. Chiswell to 2.1 miles (3.4 km) south of Route 460/11 near Christiansburg.

Status: Completing traffic analysis. First citizen information meeting to be held by early 1998. Study scheduled for completion by late 1998.

Study Area 5

Montgomery, Roanoke and Botetourt counties from 1.2 miles (1.9 km) north of Route 460/11 near Christiansburg to 1 mile (1.6 km) north of Route 11 south of Buchanan.

Status: Completing traffic analysis. First citizen information meeting will be held in late 1997. Study scheduled for completion by mid-1998.

Study Area 6

Botetourt and Rockbridge counties from 1 mile (1.6 km) north of Route 11 south of Buchanan to 0.6 mile (1 km) south of Route 11 at Natural Bridge.

Status: Traffic studies under way. First citizen information meeting will be held in early 1998. Study scheduled for completion by late 1998.

Study Area 7

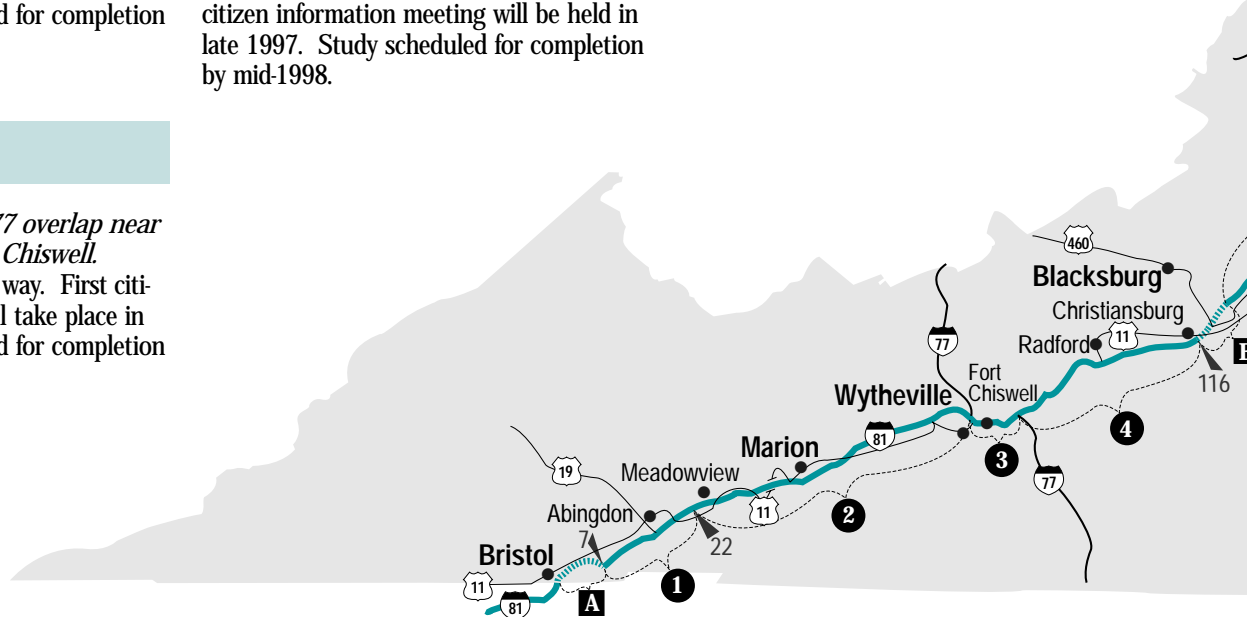
Rockbridge and Augusta counties from 0.6 mile (1 km) south of Route 11 at Natural Bridge to 0.9 mile (1.5 km) north of Route 612 at Verona.

Status: Completing traffic analysis. First citizen information meeting will take place in late 1997. Study scheduled for completion by mid-1998.

Study Area 8

Augusta, Rockingham and Shenandoah counties from 0.9 mile (1.5 km) north of Route 612 at Verona to 1 mile (1.6 km) south of Route 211 at New Market.

Status: Completing traffic analysis. First citizen information meeting to take place in early 1998. Study scheduled for completion by late 1998.



Study Area 9

Shenandoah and Frederick counties from 1 mile (1.6km) south of Route 211 at New Market to 2.1 mile (3.4 km) south of Route 277 at Stephens City.

Status: Traffic analysis under way. First citizen information meeting to be held in early 1998. Study to be completed by late 1998.

Study Area 10

Frederick County from 2.1 miles (3.4 km) south of Route 277 at Stephens City to the Virginia-West Virginia line.

Status: Completing traffic analysis. First citizen information meeting to be held in late 1997. Study to be completed by mid-1998.

Construction Project A

Construction begins in spring 1998 to widen seven miles of I-81 near Bristol from four to six lanes.

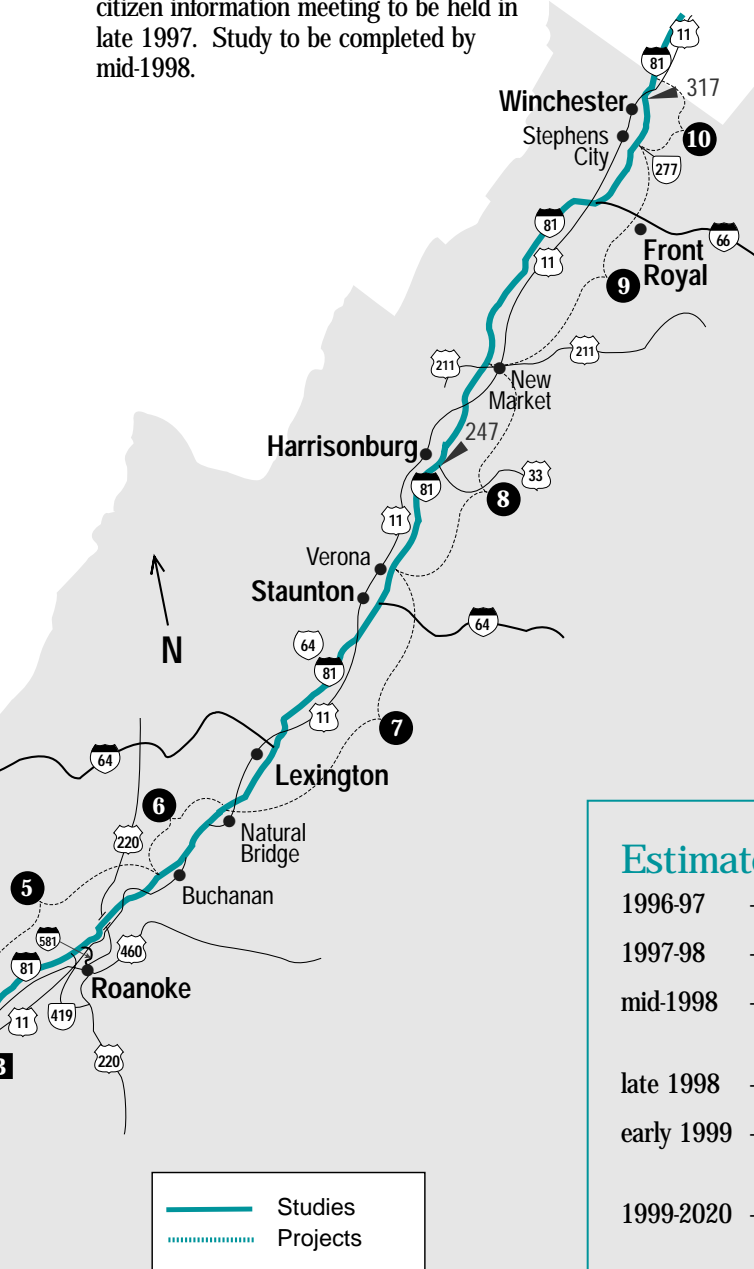
Construction Project B

Construction begins in spring 1998 on Christiansburg area interchange and collector-distributor lanes.

Meeting Dates to be Posted on the Web

As soon as I-81 public meetings are scheduled, we will post them on VDOT's Web site. Our Web site address is www.vdot.state.va.us. Once you've reached our Web page, click on "Planning and Projects." Then look for I-81 information under "western Virginia." If you have additional questions, contact your local VDOT office.

The first public meetings are planned for late fall 1997 or early 1998 in all of the study areas. Only one meeting - in Bristol - has been held so far. There will be two public meetings in each study area. See map to determine which study area includes your community. ■



Estimated Timetable for I-81 Improvements

- 1996-97 - All 10 widening studies under way
- 1997-98 - Two citizen information meetings held in each study area
- mid-1998 - Widening construction begins in Bristol area; construction begins on Christiansburg area interchange
- late 1998 - All studies completed; best widening options selected
- early 1999 - Study results reviewed by Commonwealth Transportation Board; preliminary construction priorities set
- 1999-2020 - Ongoing construction/improvements

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Smart Travel Plans

2. VDOT has begun construction on the Smart Road, which will link Blacksburg with I-81 and serve as a test bed for new transportation technologies. In a ground-breaking ceremony on July 8 in Blacksburg, Virginia Gov. George Allen hailed the project as a "high-tech investment to promote ITS (Intelligent Transportation Systems) entrepreneurship in Virginia."



Over 400 supporters, representing business, government and community groups, gathered at the site of the new road to celebrate the initiative. VDOT, working with Virginia Tech's Center for Transportation Research and the Federal Highway Administration, expects to build and equip the two-mile test bed by the year 2000. It will be open to the public once the full 5.7 miles is complete.

3. Nine electronic message signs will be installed on the I-81 corridor by late 1998. The signs will be placed at major interchanges to warn motorists of delays and to communicate detour options. ■

New Truck Law Delays - Yet Enhances - Interstate Studies

New state legislation limiting commercial trucks to the right-hand lanes on Virginia highways has had a "bad news/great news" effect on the I-81 widening studies. The bad news is that it temporarily delayed the conceptual studies by a few months after it was discovered that the traditional traffic analysis software could not incorporate the changes. But the great news is that VDOT's new software not only handles lane restrictions, but will result in better traffic forecasting overall. What's more, the new easy-to-understand format will help the general public understand it, too.

In June, VDOT held training sessions for the I-81 study consultants to learn the new CORSIM software program to ensure consistency among the studies.

"The new software gives us greater flexibility and allows a more precise analysis ... to foresee all possible road and travel conditions, including back-ups on connecting roads," says VDOT transportation planner Don Wells. "It will enhance our forecasting process for I-81 - and other road projects."

One of the most useful aspects of the new software is the graphical animation, says Wells. "It allows both engineers and non-engineers to view the movement of vehicles under various improvement options in an easy-to-understand format. By simulating traffic situations on the computer screen, the public can see how certain improvements affect traffic flow. It's an eye-opening tool for everyone." ■

Four-State Group Backs Upgrade

A group of legislators from Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland and West Virginia has agreed to push for a coordinated strategy to improve I-81 from Pennsylvania through Virginia. The legislators discussed issues facing I-81 at the 12th Annual Quad-State Legislative Conference on July 10 in Frederick County, Va.

The legislators cited increases in traffic - in particular, trucks - as the main reason

for the push to improve I-81. The interstate, which is designed to handle 15 percent truck traffic, regularly handles between 20-40 percent trucks now, according to Virginia Department of Transportation estimates. The legislators also pointed to sound transportation planning in and around the I-81 corridor as critical to the region's economic vitality. ■

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